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CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN

75-86.106

NATHAN APPLETON

AND

JOHN G. PALFREY

INTENDED AS A SUPPLEMENT TO MR. PALFREY'S

PAMPHLET ON THE SLAVE POWER.

BOSTON:
1846.
EASTBURN'S PRESS.

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Aug, 16, 1876.

CORRESPONDENCE.

NUMBER I.

MR. APPLETON TO MR. PALFREY.

BOSTON, 15TH OCTOBER, 1846.

DEAR SIR,

You have published with your name a Pamphlet consisting of twenty-four numbers on the slave power, first published anonymously in the Boston Daily Whig.

In this pamphlet you have given my name a particular prominence, devoting to it a large part of three different numbers.

In your ninth number you attribute to me the unenviable distinction of having caused the Mexican war. You speak of "surprising news from Boston." "Mr. Appleton and some of his friends had given their adhesion" (to the slave power.) "The news of the new movement reaching Washington." "The game of opposition being up" by this "demonstration of Mr. Appleton" coming "as unexpectedly as a thunder clap in a clear sky."

No "thunder clap" could have taken me as much by surprise as did the perusal of this article. Any one reading it would suppose that I had been engaged in some deep intrigue, some strange plot against the peace of the country. Now the simple fact was, that I had received a letter signed by yourself and two other gentlemen to which you requested an answer. I did not choose to be guilty of the incivility of declining your request. I wrote

an answer expressing my opinion on the subject matter of your letter.

This was my whole action, my whole *demonstration* as you are pleased to call it. This letter you thought proper to publish, and it is to that publication that you attribute such tremendous results.

I was at a loss whether to consider the whole thing more ludicrous or absurd; but considering the tone of the article I thought it due to a becoming self respect to set the readers of the Whig right as to my real agency in the matter. I accordingly sent to that paper a communication which was published on the 14th of August. Here I was willing to let the matter rest, as the readers of the Whig had my explanation before them in the same paper.

But the case is changed when you publish these numbers in a pamphlet, without this explanation or any reference to it, and under the sanction of your name, the original charge fortified and commented on in two additional numbers, in a manner to which I will not apply the appropriate epithet.

It is evident that the circulation of the pamphlet, under these circumstances, is calculated to do me great injustice. It affords no clue to the actual facts in the case. I therefore ask of you, as an act of simple justice, that you will cause to be added to such of the pamphlets as shall be circulated hereafter, an appendix, containing my letter of the 10th November, 1845, addressed to Messrs. Adams, Sumner and yourself, to which you attach such importance, together with my letter to the Editor of the Boston Daily Whig, published in that paper on the 14th of August. This will be but the work of a few hours, and I take it for granted you will see the propriety of it.

I am not disposed to make any comment on the personalities in which you have thought proper to indulge, whether in the original or the expurgated edition. That is very much a matter of taste. I am quite content to leave my character in the hands of the public. I only wish that

the facts in the case may be fairly presented before them. There is nothing in either of the two letters which I ask you to publish which I wish to retract.

I am sir, your very obedient servant,

N. APPLETON.

To John G. Palfrey, Esq.

The following are the letters referred to in the foregoing.

NUMBER II.

Boston, 10 November, 1845.

Gentlemen:

I have received a circular with your signatures, bearing date the 6th inst. asking my aid and coöperation in the measures taking by the Massachusetts Texas Committee, and requesting an early answer. With this last request coming from gentlemen for whom I have the highest personal respect, I feel bound in common courtesy to comply.

I cannot however take part in this Texas movement. For all practical purposes, so far as the people are concerned I consider the question settled. I have opposed it, and contributed funds to oppose it, so long as there appeared to be any chance of preventing it. Massachusetts has done her duty, and her Senators and Representatives will continue to do theirs. Beyond that I cannot think it good policy to waste our energies in hopeless efforts upon the impossible.

I observe amongst the parties to this movement, a great number, if not a majority of those who have distinguished themselves as members of the Abolition Party.

Now I believe our fathers did wisely in establishing the union of the States under the existing constitution. It is at least questionable whether the Abolition movement is reconcilable with duty under that constitution. At any rate that movement as conducted was calculated, in my opinion to produce and has produced, nothing but evil. It has banded the South into a solid phalanx in resistance to what they consider an impertinent and unjustifiable interference with their own peculiar rights and business. It has thus exasperated their feelings, and by its operation on their fears increased the severity of the slave laws. It has postponed the period of emancipation in the more northern slave states, which were fast ripening for that event. Finally by its political action it has secured the election of Mr. Polk, and the admission of Texas into the Union.

I cannot sympathize with their cry of "Accursed be the Union," and I cannot but regret some of the sentiments contained in the documents enclosed to me. I cannot furnish funds to aid in their dissemination.

With much respect, I am, gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

N. APPLETON.

To Messrs. Charles F. Adams,
John G. Palfrey,
Charles Sumner.

(This letter was sent under cover to Charles Sumner, Esq.)

NUMBER III.

From the Boston Daily Whig 14th August, 1846.

To the Editor:—

In the Daily Whig of 1st inst., I find my name repeated through a column and an half of matter, the whole object of which purports

to be, to make it appear that this humble individual was the cause of the removal of the United States troops from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande, and of course of the war with Mexico.

Heaven bless us! Is this in joke or in earnest? Is your facetious correspondent indulging his fancy in a playful romance, or in brooding over the slave power and the evils of slavery has he himself fallen into bondage to one single idea? I will not decide. The article is elaborately written, and has all the air and manner of sober belief.

But what is the ground work for this hypothesis? In November last three gentlemen addressed to me a written communication,* with their signatures attached to it. They asked my co-operation in certain measures relating to the admission of Texas. They asked me to furnish funds for the circulation of certain printed addresses and circulars of which they enclosed me copies.

At this time the act admitting Texas into the Union had passed both houses of Congress and become a law. The only condition was, that her Constitution should conform to the constitutional provision.

In the mean time a new Congress had been elected with an immense majority, as was well known, in favor of the admission of Texas. Under these circumstances, I considered the attempt to prevent the annexation of Texas, by petition, as futile as would be the attempt to roll back the current of the Mississippi. I was not disposed to be a party to it.

Amongst the papers which I was asked to assist in circulating was an address intended to be sent to every clergyman in the country, urging them to devote one Sunday at least to the discussion of this political question. I could not think favorably of this proposal. But the contemptuous manner in which the constitution of the United States, the bond of our national union, was sneered at, in one of the circulars, gave me unmingled disgust.

The gentlemen who addressed me the note were personal friends whom I highly esteemed. They requested me to give them an answer. In common courtesy I was bound to do so. I sent them the letter to which your correspondent attaches such immense importance. I regretted to see my friends playing into the hands of the *disunionists*, the party whose political course had,

*This is not precisely correct, the body of the letter was printed, the signatures only were written.

as I believed, brought Mr. Polk into the Presidency and Texas into the Union. I stated my reasons for declining to act with them. But it was a private letter. It expressed my own opinions. I spoke only for myself. I consulted no one. How then came this dangerous letter, this "*thunder clap*" published? The *parties to whom it was addressed themselves published it*, not without comment, but without consulting me at all. If the letter was the immediate cause of the aggression upon Mexico, are not the publishers as much in fault as the writer? It was not written for publication. It was written purely and solely for the consideration of friends, not without the hope of influencing at least one of them. These friends have sent it forth on the wings of the wind. They now complain of the mischief which it has done, and characterise it as a "demonstration" of Mr. Appleton. Did they not perceive its character? Were they not aware of its dangerous tendency?

I have not however the vanity to believe that this simple letter had any effect whatever on public affairs. Your correspondent would seem to infer that it prevented remonstrances being made to Congress by 780,000 persons; an effect truly magical. It contained in fact no other talisman but a few simple truths; truths common to a vast majority of the community. It was the feeling of these truths in the heart of the country which disappointed the movers of this agitation, and not their apearance with my signature attached to them.

I confess that I have always considered the Union of the States as the palladium of our safety, our only ark of security. To this opinion I have held through good and through evil. I hold to it still. Notwithstanding the Texas iniquity, notwithstanding the wicked Mexican war, notwithstanding the destructive tariff of 1846, I still cling to the Union of the States. All the evils of bad legislation and bad administration are light, in my apprehension, compared to those which must inevitably flow from a disruption of the States.

I am not disposed to newspaper controversy; but whether your correspondent was in jest or earnest, I have thought thus much due, to set this matter in its true light before your readers.

N. APPLETON.

August 8, 1846.

NUMBER IV.

MR. PALFREY TO MR. APPLETON.

Boston, Oct. 17th, 1846.

Sir:

Your note of the 15th instant, reached me through the Boston Post Office, after some little delay, occasioned by its being mailed to Cambridge, where I do not send for letters.

I cannot sufficiently express my surprise at the treatment I receive. You have been for years a leader of the Whig Party, of which I have been an humble but a trusted member. Some of us who last Autumn undertook to obtain an expression of the freemen of the Commonwealth on the pending measure of the annexation of Texas, understood ourselves to be standing precisely on the Whig platform, as laid down in the Resolves of a succession of Massachusetts Whig Legislatures. It is now the opinion of many, that a secession from the ground taken in those Resolves was determined on, in high quarters in Boston, as early as the beginning of last Summer.

As a member of a sub-committee, I signed a large number of printed circular letters, intended to be addressed to such as, from their past course, might be expected to favor the object. The circulars then passed into other hands, to be so addressed. To one sent to you, you replied in terms understood to indicate a purpose on your part to put down the movement, as far as your influence would go, by heaping a load of undeserved odium on some of those who were conducting it. Your letter was published by the Texas State Committee, for reasons which have since been set forth in an editorial of the Boston Whig; which reasons appear to me to be very valid and sufficient. I had however nothing to do with its publication. In the presence of others I heard a part of it read by a gentleman in relations of particular friendship with you, and I took it to be addressed to him just as another letter on the same

subject was addressed to Mr. Adams. I knew nothing of its being in answer to one of the circulars I had signed, or of my having any personal concern with it whatever, until it met my eye in the newspaper with my name as one of the persons addressed. I then saw myself, with others, before the public, stigmatized by a very distinct imputation, under your hand, of disloyalty to the Union, which in my case was unfaithfulness not only to the obligations of a good citizen, but to those also of an official oath.

I do not understand you now to say, that, if the Committee had not published the letter, it would not have seen the light. It presently afterwards appeared in the Advertiser and other papers, and as far as those prints circulate they circulated a grievous reflection on me. The charge has gone out over the globe. I cannot pursue it with a vindication. I submit with such grace as I may to what is the too common fate of controversy. You inform me now that you do not "wish to retract" anything in the letter which contains it. You go so far as to ask me to circulate the insult anew, as the permanent persuasion of your mind. I happen even to know, so unhappily equivocal was your language, that your letter has been understood as meaning that the words "Accursed be the Union" were words that we had expressly invited you to join us in using.

Some of my friends endeavoured to get a reply into the Advertiser, but were denied. I had no part in that application, and never expected to publish any thing about the matter, being "quite content" as you say you are, "to leave my character in the hands of the public," though, of course, I was not insensible to the hardship of the position.

I undertook last summer to furnish some papers on the Slave Power to the Whig. It had not occurred to me, when I began them, that I should have to use your name or any one's. I did not seek the occasion; it forced itself upon me as I wrote.

You say; "In your ninth number you attribnte to *me* the unenviable distinction of having caused the Mexican

War," and, " it is to that publication [the publication of your letter] that you [I] attribute such tremendous results." Pardon me for asking you to give that paragraph a second reading, and to consider whether it sustains your remarks. In that number I have spoken of what appeared to have been understood at Washington of the secession of yourself and others from the ground hitherto occupied by the brave Whig party of the North, which party had hitherto been the chief agent in keeping a profligate administration in check in its enormous usurpations upon right and freedom ; and I have guessed that the administration was emboldened in its bad designs by seeing the party which it dreaded thrown into confusion and disabled in its strong Northern hold. Certainly you do not think it incredible that the government should be relieved and encouraged in pursuing a favorite policy by seeing opposition to it in a formidable quarter enfeebled or abandoned.

The "demonstration" of yourself and your friends was of course too important a part of the history to be passed over. It consisted of whatever you and they said and did, at that critical time, to discourage and check further opposition to the annexation of Texas. Your letter was not the "demonstration," but it was the most salient part of it known to me, presenting the argument against us in the most tangible and explicit form ; and as such I referred to and quoted it. You call upon me to print an account of the circumstances under which it was published, in order to shew that I have miscalled it by the name of the "demonstration" of which I speak. But I have not called it so. On the contrary, I have distinguished between them. My language is (No. 9.) " The demonstration of Mr. Appleton AND HIS FRIENDS, *whenever and however else it might have been made, was simultaneous with and was apparently occasioned by*," &c. ; and I then refer to your letter as part of that demonstration of yourself and those who acted with you. How could I do better? These were your sentiments, carefully written out under

your hand. Referring to that, I was in no danger of misrepresenting you. I could not refer to any of your letters, not before the public. I could not refer to any of your conversations, which might have been incorrectly reported. When you say, "this [the letter] was my whole action, my whole demonstration," I cannot understand you as intending to declare that you did not express the same sentiments in other forms.

You wrote a letter to the Editor of the Whig respecting my remarks, which he published. You did not see fit to address me upon the subject, though I believe it was known to you that I was the author of the papers. Previously to the publication, the editor asked me if I would make any comments upon it. I declined. I did not and have not said of it, nor will I, what the Advertiser said of the comment of my friend on your first letter, that it was "too puerile to deserve publication." But I did not attach to it any considerable importance. Nor, I was fain to think, did you. I have it not now by me. But my recollection cannot be in error as to its being light and sportive in its tenor and tone, and further, if I remember rightly, in the unpublished note with which you accompanied it, you expressed yourself to a great degree indifferent whether it was published or not, and left it at the disposal of the friend to whom it was sent.

You now ask me "as an act of simple justice" to publish it, and by the offensive language with which you accompany the request, you of course decline to put it on any other ground. Were there any alleged misstatement of a fact, the claim of justice would be good. But such is not the case now in hand. I do not perceive that there can be any danger of misapprehension of what I have said of a demonstration of yourself and your friends. On the two occasions on which I have referred to your letter (Nos. 9 and 22, *pp.* 26 and 77 of the pamphlet,) I have distinctly said that it was in reply to an application in behalf of the Texas Committee to you for aid. So far from intimating that you published it, I have not, I think, any-

where spoken of it as having been published at all. As you appear however to attach some importance to the point, I will, should the papers come to a second edition, state that it was published by the State Texas Committee. I may also publish your letters, though at present I think I shall not do so. In that case I shall of course accompany them with this note, or with such other comment as may then seem to me to be proper.

You speak of "personalities." I am not aware that I have been stung by the bitter personality with which I was first assailed, into any transgression of the legitimate freedom of discussion of the course of men exerting great influence on public affairs. As to unworthy personalities, I will try patiently to bear, but I do not intend to deal in them. In connexion with my humble name, I have within a few weeks heard not a few such, with which I am told "all *State Street* rings from side to side." You have perhaps seen the Atlas of three or four days ago. Did I ever use a personality like that, of any man of any fair standing? But I let it go, "content to leave my character in the hands of the public."

I do not allow myself to be pained by your overbearing language. It is best that we should understand one another. I am not to be so overborne. Doubtless in station and influence you have greatly the advantage of me. But I, as much as yourself, am a freeman of Massachusetts, in the enjoyment as yet of political privileges, inherited from ancestors who did their full part in winning them, and which, please God, I will do my best to secure for their posterity and mine. Nothing, I think, will stay me from doing what I judge I ought to do, in duty to them and to my country

I am sir, your obedient servant.

JOHN G. PALFREY.

Hon. N. Appleton.

NUMBER V.

MR. APPLETON TO MR. PALFREY.

Boston, 24th Oct. 1846.

Dear Sir:

Yours of the 17th reached me on the 20th inst. Different engagements have prevented me from giving attention to it until to day.

My letter to you contained but a single point. I complained that in publishing and circulating your pamphlet on the Slave Power, without my original letter, or my explanation, as published in the Whig, you did me injustice, inasmuch as you attributed to me the movements in Washington which resulted in the Mexican War, without furnishing your readers with a correct statement of the grounds on which that opinion was founded.

Your answer of ten pages introduces a number of new issues, some of which appear to me wholly irrelevant to the single one which I presented to you, and those you will pardon me for passing over very summarily.

You begin by stating that "I have been for years a leader of the Whig party"—an assertion however flattering by no means true. For many years I have had no part or lot in the politics of Massachusetts, except as an individual citizen—As far as negative proof goes, I can appeal to yourself, who have been for many years an active member of the Legislature. You certainly have never known or heard of my interference—I have had nothing to do with the resolves which have passed our Legislature. They have never been submitted to me, nor have I been consulted about them—of some of them I probably should not have approved.

You then refer to my letter of last November, in a manner which is to me, another *thunder clap*—You speak of it as "heaping undeserved odium on some of those who were conducting the Texas movement." That you there "saw yourself with others, stigmatized by a very distinct

imputation under (my) hand of disloyalty to the Union"—and that you consider my request to you to publish that letter, as asking you "to circulate the *insult* anew."

I must be strangely incapable of using language suited to convey my meaning or to express my feelings, if there is the slighest ground for these charges—I had no idea of heaping odium on any one, nor of saying a word disrespectful or offensive to you, or either of the gentlemen who sent me the letter which I was answering. My obliquity of vision continues, and I cannot with all the light you throw upon it, perceive how I could, with these feelings have expressed myself more cautiously and carefully.

I had lately seen in the book called the "Liberty Bell" printed for the Anti-Slavery Fair of 1845, an article in which the phrase, "*Accursed be the Union*" was many times repeated in a manner giving me a disgust bordering upon horror.

The name of the writer was attached to it, and I observed that name amongst the signers of the address which I was asked to furnish funds to circulate, together with those of many others, who from their connection with that Society, I had reason to suppose approved of that sentiment. It was in reference to this circumstance that after having referred to the political action of the "Abolition party" I used the following language. "I cannot sympathise with *their* cry of 'accursed be the Union,' and I cannot but regret some of the sentiments contained in the documents enclosed to me. I cannot furnish funds to aid in their circulation."

How you can construe this as casting "undeserved odium" on those whose own sentiment I quoted in their own words, or as imputing "disloyalty to the Union" to yourself, is past my comprehension—I did not then believe, nor did I intimate, that you and some others whose names I regretted to see attached to that address, did sympathise with that cry—But I thought the following expression came somewhat too near it for me—"*Be it that the United States Constitution nullifies our consciences and*

religion,"—which certainly to me sounds rather odd from the lips of those who have sworn to support that Constitution. Neither as matter of fact or of taste could I assist in circulating the following—"*Remember the Bowie Knife horrors between the whites themselves with which the whole South teems.*" These quotations are only samples. I am bound in charity to believe, as I certainly hope, that some of those who signed that address did so without reading it.

You seem desirous, by violent special pleading, to avoid the application of your expression, "the demonstration of Mr. Appleton and his friends" to the simple fact of the publication of that letter, made by yourself and your associates.

You intimate that I might have said the same thing in conversation, and that the letter might have seen the light through my agency. I do not perceive the pertinency of these suggestions, but for your satisfaction will assure you that I never had the slightest idea of publishing it myself. I never had any agency in its republication or circulation. And I have no recollection, in the numerous instances in which it was mentioned to me, of ever being called on to make any explanationof it. Certainly, I never heard of its casting any unjust imputation on any one. I wish you at the same time to understand that I never made any complaint on account of its publication. It was unexpected to me, but I never complained of it.

You refer to my letter to the Editor of the Whig, and would seem to imply, that it ought to have been addressed to yourself. I should have thought it indelicate to do so as your article was anonymous, even had I not considered the intimation made to me, of its authorship, private.

It is true that letter was written in perfect good humor and I make no objection to the character you give it, as "light and sportive in its tenor and tone." At the time I wrote it, I had not seen your No. 11, and was not aware of the tremendous personal consequences which you deduced from my letter of November.

Our social relations had always been friendly. On

reading that number I found myself fallen very low in your esteem. Regret it as I might, of this I had no right to complain—but I thought it somewhat unkind to publish it to the world. I regretted on your own account the comments with which you thought proper to accompany this annunciation in your original publication, and in its amended form, I cannot but think the expression, "Mr. Appleton's position is not favorable to elevated views of public policy," any thing but complimentary to the whole mercantile community, as embraced in the same category.

The insinuation of unfairness in my Examination of Mr. Walker's Revenue Standard is as unjust as it was uncalled for.

I find some palliation for all this, in the fact which you now communicate to me, that you had felt yourself *stung* by what you term "*bitter personality*" in my first letter—the venom of which must have been rankling in your bosom for nine months. I confess the knowledge of this fact is some relief to me, for notwithstanding my inability to imagine the mental process by which that feeling was produced, from language so perfectly harmless as mine, it furnishes a motive for conduct which was previously to me wholly inexplicable. You had introduced my name into your pamphlet, I should think at least twenty times, and always disparagingly. It appeared to me the most truly spontaneous and gratuitous ebullition of ill nature which had ever fallen within the circle of my observation.

I cannot answer for your grievances with the Advertiser, Atlas, or State Street. I have no control over either of them. But I may be permitted to inquire what you mean by attributing to me "*overbearing language?*" I challenge you to point out any sentence, word or syllable of mine to which that epithet will apply. I commend your determination not to be overborne. It is a worthy sentiment, but should always be accompanied by the determination to avoid injustice to others.

I shall not repeat my request to you to print my letters. It is my intention to publish the whole correspondence. This will do justice to us both.

I am sir,

Your very ob't serv't,

N. APPLETON.

JOHN G. PALFREY, ESQ.

APPENDIX.

From the Liberty Bell of 1845.

EXTRACTS FROM "THE AMERICAN UNION," BY WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON.

"Accursed be the AMERICAN UNION, as a stupendous republican imposture!

"Accursed be it, as the most frightful despotism, with regard to three millions of the people ever exercised over any portion of the human family!

"Accursed be it, as the most subtle and atrocious compromise ever made to gratify power and selfishness!

"Accursed be it as a libel on Democracy, and a bold assault on Christianity!

"Accursed be it as stained with human blood, and supported by human sacrifices!

"Accursed be it for the terrible evils it has inflicted on Africa, by burning her villages, ravaging her coast, and kidnapping her children, at an enormous expense of human life, and for a diabolical purpose!

"Accursed be it for all the crimes it has committed at home—for seeking the utter extermination of the red men of its wildernesses, and for enslaving one sixth part of its teeming population!

"Accursed be it, for its hypocrisy, its falsehood, its impudence, its lust, its cruelty, its oppression!

"Accursed be it, as a mighty obstacle in the way of universal freedom and equality!

"Accursed be it, from the foundation to the roof, and may there soon not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down!

"Henceforth the watchword of every uncompromising abolitionist, of every friend of God and liberty, must be, both in a religious and political sense—'NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS!"

EXTRACTS FROM "THE NATIONAL COMPACT," BY FRANCIS JACKSON.

"The Constitution of the United States, both in theory and practice, is so utterly broken down by the influence and effects of slavery, so imbecile for the highest good of the nation, and so powerful for evil, that I can give no voluntary assistance in holding it up any longer.

"Henceforth it is dead to me and I to it. I withdraw all profession of allegiance to it, and all my voluntary efforts to sustain it.

EXTRACTS FROM "THE CONSTITUTION," BY WENDELL PHILLIPS.

"Now the Constitution of the United States is either anti-slavery or pro-slavery in its character. If the latter, if it binds us to sustain slavery in any degree, then surely it is 'a covenant with death and an agreement with hell,' and ought to be immediately annulled. No abolitionist can take office under it or swear to support it."

"If on the other hand it is an anti-slavery instrument then union itself is impossible without guilt. * * *

There is no course left for honest men but to join in the battle cry of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

"NO UNION WITH SLAVE HOLDERS."

These gentlemen were all signers to the address, for the circulation of which, funds were asked.